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SUBJECT: LATVIA: JOURNALISTS, EDITOR LEAVE LATVIA'S LEADING DAILY

[¶1](#). SUMMARY: The editor-in-chief of Latvia's leading daily newspaper Diena and several other journalists resigned on Oct. 9 after learning that the company's new owner is a wealthy family from Great

Britain. The editors had been locked in a standoff with the company's CEO, Alexandrs Tralmaks, since his company purchased the newspaper publisher in July. The departing journalists are expected to reconstitute themselves in a new media outlet. Uncertainty about the future of Diena, most independent, and objective news outlet, and its editorial independence remain. END SUMMARY

[¶2](#). On Friday, Nellijs Nocmele, editor in chief of the publishing house Dienas mediji, and Anita Brauna, editor in chief of its primary newspaper, 'Diena, submitted their resignations along with a dozen journalists. Among those who left the paper were several senior reporters and the American-born Pauls Raudseps, the paper's editorial page editor and one of its founders. In an online blog set up after the resignation, the journalists cited "serious differences regarding the future of the newspaper" as their main reason for leaving.

[¶3](#). The Bonnier group, which owned the publishing enterprise for 19 years, announced on July 3 that it had sold the publisher to the Luxembourg-based Nedela S.A., led by Aleksanders Tralmaks, a former CEO of Diena. At that time, Tralmaks did not identify the investors in the new management company, raising questions about the motivation for the purchase, and concerns that the new owners would try to exercise influence over the editorial policy of Latvia's most respected newspaper. In September, the Editors publicly told Tralmaks that they would resign unless the names of the investors were fully disclosed.

[¶4](#). Tralmaks announced on Friday that a wealthy British family, The Rowlands, had become the primary owners. According to reports, the Rowland family had previously provided a loan so Tralmaks' company Nedela S.A. could buy the newspapers, but the loan has been restructured to show the Rowland family as owners. The announcement, however, did not satisfy the departing journalists.

[¶5](#). After leaving the newspaper, the editors, and several journalists met at a nearby coffee shop to discuss their future. No announcements have been made, but it is widely believed that the editors and journalists have discussed forming a new media outlet.

[¶6](#). COMMENT: While Latvian newspapers enjoy freedom from government interference, their editorial policies and reporting tend to be heavily influenced by owners. Diena, however, has a reputation for being Latvia's most independent, and objective news outlet. The sale of the paper and the subsequent departure of so many of its leaders raise concerns that the newspaper will lose its independent voice, or its good reputation. Since the purchase, the editors have kept their editorial freedom, often criticizing Tralmaks on their opinion pages. Whether that freedom will continue into the future is unclear. END COMMENT